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SOLDIERS OF V CORPS MEDICAL BRIGADE COLLECTING CHRISTMAS GIFTS FOR POLISH ORPHANS

By Sgt. Rosalyn Peterkin

30th Medical Brigade Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany – It's a sad fact, but for some, December 25 is no different than any other date on the calendar. Soldiers from V Corps' Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 30th Medical Brigade have decided to make sure that it isn't a fact of life for some Polish orphans this Christmas.

The 30th's involvement with the more than 80 orphans at the Dom Dziecka orphanage in Mosty, Poland began in 2002 with Col. Russell Czerw, former commander of the brigade's 93rd Medical Battalion (Dental) and his wife Michelle.

Russell Czerw learned about the orphanage while in Poland providing medical support for the joint V Corps-Polish forces exercise Victory Strike III. Wanting to do something to help the orphans, the Czerw family initiated a toy drive, collecting and delivering toys to the orphanage during the holiday season.



SGT ROSALYN PETERKIN

Pfc. Emily Gettemans of V Corps' 93rd Medical Battalion (Dental), 30th Medical Brigade, places ornaments on the "angel tree" at Nachrichten Kaserne in Heidelberg, Germany. The unit is using the tree as a means to collect Christmas gifts for orphans in Poland.

After the Czerws departed Heidelberg this summer, the 30th's Soldiers decided to take over where they left off. Sgt. Hali Picciano has frequently volunteered to support activities involving kids. She says that the Czerws were leaving, she felt compelled to continue the toy drive project.

As a result, a Christmas tree adorned with angel ornaments, each containing an orphan's wishes, was placed at the main entrance to the brigade headquarters here.

"I love helping people, and I especially love helping kids. When I read the kids' wish list, I was saddened. Their wish list made me realize that not everyone is as well off as others," said Picciano. "Christmas has been commercialized ... as a holiday where you receive what you want, and not what you need. To see a 5-year-old asking for a towel was a reality check."

The toy drive is strictly voluntary, but Staff Sgt. Michael Rosado encourages people to help meet the orphans' needs.

"The toy drive is for a worthy cause that is in keeping with the true Christian meaning of Christmas -- helping those who are less fortunate than us," said Rosado, who plans to make the trip to Mosty to deliver the gifts to the orphans.

"Christmas is a time to celebrate, to share, and to give from the heart. What better way to help than by bringing a smile to a lonely child's face on Christmas day," said Rosado.

The 93rd's Soldiers began working on the project in October, designing the tree ornaments and coordinating with the orphanage staff to get the orphans' wish list.

Gifts are being collected for orphans ranging from ages 3 to 17 years old. Of the 80 at Dom Dziecka, about 10 of the orphans have requested toys. Other items on the wish list include winter clothes, blankets, towels, toothbrushes, football cleats, hats and scarves.

Picciano and Rosado agreed that the orphans' requests were not what an American might consider an ordinary Christmas wish list.

"These kids don't have the Christmas like we have. I've never made a wish list that consisted of things that I needed to live," said Picciano.

"Their wish list made me realize how much we take for granted," said Rosado. "This was a cold wake-up call to reassess life's priorities."

The brigade is accepting contributions from anyone who would like to give. The name, gender, age, and wish of each orphan is written on an angel ornament on the tree. When purchasing a gift, donors are asked to remove an ornament and return with a wrapped gift and one of the color-coded nametags provided for each orphan.

The angel tree is located in Building 3607 on Nachrichten Kaserne here. Presents will be accepted until December 10 and will be delivered to the orphans December 13.

Gifts may be given to Picciano in Room 117.

For more information, call Picciano at 371-2826 or 06221-172826, or send an e-mail to hali.picciano@us.army.mil.

